



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mark Twain National Forest
Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek
Ranger District

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File Code: 1950

Date: March 6, 2012

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Interested Parties:

The Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek (HRCC) Ranger District of the Mark Twain National Forest is seeking your comments on an openland management proposed action on Cedar Creek Grazing Allotments. We have named this the **Cedar Creek Range East Project**. The purpose of this letter is to inform interested and affected parties of our proposed management activities and to solicit public comments on the proposal.

Location and Setting

The project area is located on 25 separate tracts of National Forest System lands totaling approximately 4,712 acres of open pastures through-out the Cedar Creek portion of the District (Please refer to attached vicinity map). Lands that make up the Cedar Creek Ranger District were all privately owned prior to 1937. In the early 1940's the U.S. Soil Conservation Service purchased the land. In 1953, the land was transferred to the U.S. Forest Service for administration and management. These 25 grazing allotments are on National Forest System Lands and have been managed as a grazing resource since acquisition.

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of authorizing grazing is contained in several levels of Forest Service regulations and policy. In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 1995 Rescissions Act, the purpose of this project is to authorize livestock grazing on 25 existing grazing allotments on the HRCC Ranger District. (See Table 1) The NFS lands within these 25 allotments have been identified as suitable for domestic livestock grazing in the 2005 Forest Plan. It is Forest Service policy to make forage available to qualified livestock operators from lands suitable for grazing consistent with land management plans (FSM 2203.1; 36 CFR 222.2 (C)).

Under the current grazing management, the allotments must meet desired conditions in a desired timeframe. In order to continue to meet desired condition through existing management techniques the following maintenance would be completed:

- Maintain range infrastructure (i.e. gates, fences) to improve rotational grazing;
- Maintain existing water developments to enhance livestock distribution;
- Maintain openlands through mowing, hand cutting, seeding, fertilizing, liming, mechanical treatments of non-native invasive plants ;



- Maintain warm and cool season pastures to provide quality forage that includes a variety of warm and cool season grasses and forbs.

The Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek Ranger District is proposing to authorize livestock grazing in a manner that continues to meet Forest Plan Goals and Objectives. The primary purpose of this action is to provide range forage in response to demand and provide openland management. The 2005 Forest Plan sets goals and objectives for the management of the Mark Twain National Forest. Goals and Objectives describe the desired resource condition sometime in the future and are the basis for project-level planning. The standards, guidelines, and management prescriptions contained in the 2005 Mark Twain Forest Plan set parameters with which projects must take place. Approval of any project must be consistent with these parameters (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)).

This project will meet the following Forest Plan Goals and Objectives (2005 Forest Plan pp 1-1 to 1-7).

Forest Plans Goals and Objectives

Goal 2.1 – Public Values - Within the capability of sustainable ecosystems, offer multiple benefits that contribute to the social and economic well-being of local and regional communities by providing a variety of uses, values, products, and services in a cost effective manner for present and future generations.

Goal 2.7 – Range Management - Within the capability of sustainable ecosystems, provide range forage on open lands in response to demand. Encourage the restoration, establishment, and management of native grass communities on ecologically appropriate sites. Restore and sustain the distribution and quality of native vegetation in range management units by increasing species diversity and eliminating the spread of non-native invasive species. Manage cool season pastures to provide quality forage that includes a variety of cool season grasses and forbs.

The following 2005 Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines will be applied (2005 Forest Plan, pp 2-20 to 2-21):

- Control the timing, duration, and intensity of livestock grazing to achieve desired structure and species composition objectives.
- Allow grazing only in those areas with adequate fencing for control and management of livestock.
- Grazing is not allowed within 100 feet of springs, significant seeps, fens, other wetland features, or the break of a sinkhole basin.

Members of the Interdisciplinary Team inspected each of the 25 allotments to ground truth and assess allotment conditions and verify Riparian Management Zone (RMZ) boundaries. In all 25 allotments fencing would be utilized (where necessary) to keep livestock from RMZs. In accordance with the 2005 Forest Plan, grazing will not be permitted in RMZ's.

Proposed Action

- This project would issue Grazing Permits and Allotment Management Plans (AMP). The AMP's would implement an adaptive management approach (FSH 2209.13, Chapter 90) which will specify the maximum limits or parameters for the appropriate timing, intensity, frequency, and duration for grazing. Annual Operating Plans with permittees will be in place.

- Maintenance practices to include: mowing, hand-cutting, seeding, fertilizing, liming, mechanical treatments of non-native invasive plants, water source and fence maintenance. The above actions have been variously implemented within the previously existing, grazed, and maintained allotments, and constitute a continuation of ongoing activities; therefore, they are not anticipated to result in additional ground disturbance.
- AMPs will comply with the 2005 Forest Plan and are designed to use cattle grazing to help meet wildlife objectives while minimizing impacts to other resources such as soil, water, and aquatics. There are no Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive species known to occur within the fields which are currently being grazed on HRCC.
- Monitoring of the allotments will take place annually. Monitoring will be used to determine the need for changes in numbers or duration of use due to reduced forage availability from drought or excess forage from above normal precipitation.

Decision to be Made

The District Ranger of the Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek District is the responsible official for selecting an alternative for this project. Based on the environmental analysis, Forest Plan direction, and the results of public involvement, the responsible official must decide whether or not to proceed with a specific action. If an action alternative is selected, the decision may include mitigation measures in addition to Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines.

This decision is not one of land allocation, nor is the analysis intended to look at every possible combination of activities. The scope of the decision will be confined to a reasonable range of alternatives that will meet the projects purpose and need.

I am using the discretion given to me as the Responsible Official by 36 CFR 215.5(a)(2) in determining that this is the most effective time to provide notice under 36 CFR 215.5 (b). The scoping and 30 day comment period will run concurrently for this project since: the nature of this project is low in complexity, is conducted routinely and the environmental effects are highly predictable. An EA will be prepared; however, as permitted by our revised regulations for notice, comment, and appeal (36 CFR 215, published in the Federal Register Vol. 68, No. 107, pages 33581-33602), **there will be no further public comment period.** Commenting is required for appeal eligibility.

How to Comment

Information and detailed allotment maps on the management activities described in this document is located on the Internet at: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mtnf/projects. We invite you to comment on this proposal before the analysis has been completed and a final decision has been made. Please provide site-specific comments that are useful in helping us analyze this proposed project. These are comments that are within the scope of the proposed action, specific to the proposed action, have direct relationship to the proposed action and include supporting reasons why the comments should be considered.

If additional site specific information is desired on this project, it may be obtained in a number of ways:

- Telephone: Contact, Mark Hamel at the Rolla Ranger District Office during business hours (8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. CST) at 573-341-7443.
- In writing: Contact, Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek Ranger District, 108 S. Sam Houston Blvd., Houston, Missouri 65483. Attention: Mark Hamel. A comment form is attached for your convenience.

- Facsimile requests: Address to: Mark Hamel, NEPA Coordinator at 573-364-6844.
- Submit any E-mail responses to: comments-eastern-mark-twain-cedar-ck@fs.fed.us. Please include the project name (subject line: Cedar Creek Range East Project #38281) in the subject line of the e-mail. Acceptable formats for electronic comments are text or HTML e-mail, Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF), or formats viewable in Microsoft Office applications.

Comments must be postmarked or received within 30 days of the date the legal notice is published in the *Fulton Sun* newspaper, Fulton, Missouri. Only those who submit timely comments during this 30-day comment period will be accepted as appellants of the subsequent decision. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner (*Contact Newspaper for Legal Notice printing date*). Identification of the individual or organization that authored the comment(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility. Each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify their identity upon request.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record of this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR parts 215 or 251. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27 (d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record but under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and if the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address.

If you have any questions about the proposal or our analysis process, please contact the Houston District Office at the number above. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/s/Kimberly Bittle
KIMBERLY BITTLE
District Ranger

Enclosures (3):